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By Ted Lewis

Air Forays No Secret

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WASHINGTON — The general reaction to the spy plane incident bordered on the hysterical. There was alarm over what would now happen to the summit conference. There were silly warnings about the new threat of nuclear war.

But far worse were the fantastic statements from some Congressmen expressing shock that this country was sending spy planes over Russia — and had been doing so for at least four years.

Now this is unadulterated humbug. Some of those sounding off were probably honest enough, but they certainly should not be proud of being ignorant. One of the most startling statements of this kind was made in the Senate by the usually savvy Sen. Willis Robertson (D-Va.).

With utmost seriousness Robertson said that for 13 years as a member of the Appropriations Committee he had attended hearings on funds for the CIA.

"I was never told that the CIA had planes operating over Russia," Robertson complained.

Obviously Robertson doesn't talk to the right people. For more than four years it has been common knowledge here among those with any sort of contact with the Pentagon, State Department or CIA that our planes have been making secret missions over Russian territory.

All Congressional leaders were in on this. Our Allies knew about it. The Russians knew about it. But this government's policy was based on the premise that we never should admit publicly what our planes were doing.

But for that secrecy policy, this government would not be in the embarrassing position it is today of being forced to "come clean" by Khrushchev, and finally admitting in a public statement what has been concealed from the American people for years.

Who is responsible for this secrecy policy? That should have been a pertinent question at the Congressional briefing concerning the spy plane incident.

But no member of Congress bothered to put that query either to Secretary of State Herbert or to CIA Chief Dulles. Instead everybody was looking for a whipping boy, somebody responsible for authorizing a high-altitude spying mission which resulted in the disclosure that some of our most respected State Department officials have been deliberately lying — all for the sake of adhering to a policy line.

For patriotic reasons Congressional leaders have deliberately played along with the State Department and CIA in concealing the facts about some of these flights. They should not be criticized for what they did. After all, the cold war's spying phase does not operate on an honesty is the best policy basis.

But they must often have winced when the State Department had the audacity to make public a note to the Kremlin demanding satisfaction for the shooting down of an American plane which was "accidentally" off course.

And they also must have shud-

dered when other Congressmen made Russian-baiting speeches over some plane incident, simply on the basis of a State Department announcement which was phony.

We are not reporting that all American planes shot down by the Russians were on spy missions. In some cases weather was to blame for their being off course, and this government had an honest right to send the Kremlin a tough note.

More than a year ago, a high ranking CIA official discussed with us the danger of these secret missions over Soviet territory. He described the pilots carrying out these spying assignments as "unsung heroes."

The fliers know the dangers involved; that if they are shot down their families may never know the real circumstances of their death or capture. After death, their skill as pilots may be questioned because their planes were "off course."

This is because the State Department denies such planes were on spying missions. The CIA and State Department have defended this policy of denying any spy flights on grounds that

such pretty shaky. The argument is that we cannot conceal the destruction by the Reds of one of our planes, nor the fatalities of any crew members, even if Moscow keeps silent.

The families of those involved will learn of what has happened, the reasoning goes. It is better all around for them to be told that the plane was on a peaceful mission over some neutral country, when it goes off course due to weather conditions. Never should the parents be informed that the American plane was unarmed, and shot down while on a secret mission.

The Russians handle this problem differently. When they lose a plane spying on American occupied territory they keep the loss hush-hush. Our Air Force claims that we have knocked down far more of their intruding planes than they have of ours.

Now that this government has admitted these spy missions over Russia some Congressmen think it would make sense to abandon our secrecy policy. Who is going to believe any future official statement knowing that the truth has been twisted for expediency?